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PRESS RELEASE

Alaska National Guard

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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By Sgt. Balinda O'Neal

Alaska National Guard team places well in biathlon championships

CAMP DENALI, Alaska— Service members from the Alaska Air and Army National Guard competed in the 39th annual Chief of the National Guard Bureau Biathlon Championships at the Camp Ethan Allen Training Site in Jericho, Vt., March 2-6.

After winning the Western Regional Biathlon, the seven Guardsmen on the Alaska National Guard Biathlon Team took home an additional nine individual and team awards at the championships.

"We had representation from 21 states and 122 Soldiers and Airmen participating," said Maj. Christopher Ruggerio, National Guard Biathlon coordinator. "The Alaska National Guard did very well at all levels of competition this year and left with quite a few awards for such a novice team."

The 2014 AKNG Biathlon Team included Alaska Army National Guardsmen Lt. Col. Matthew Schell, Capt. David Cunningham, and Pfc. Tadhg Nakada, all from 1st Battalion, 207th Aviation; Capt. Karl Bruening, Joint Forces Head Quarters; Sgt. 1st Class Travis Kulp, 1-297th Reconnaissance and Surveillance Squadron; and Alaska Air National Guardsmen 2nd Lt. Kristine Laughlin-Hall, 176th Logistics Readiness Squadron, Staff Sgt. Jaime Haines, 212th Rescue Squadron and the coach Senior Master Sgt. Scott Belyea, 176th Civil Engineering Squadron.

"Our team was well-rounded with varying skill and ability levels, in both skiing and shooting, led by an extremely talented and experienced coach," said 2nd Lt. Kristine Laughlin-Hall, 176th Logistics Squadron, Alaska Air National Guard.

Biathlon is a winter sport that combines skiing and precision marksmanship. Participants alternate between skiing laps intended to get their heart rate up, and then transitioning to shooting small targets at 50 meters while attempting to control their breathing.

This sport is unique in that it occurs at opposite ends of the athletic physiology spectrum, combining extreme cardiovascular stress with absolute mental focus.

"Biathlon hones in on the critical skills of shoot, move and communicate," Ruggerio said. "There are no other sports I can think of that better mimic combat stress on a service member than biathlon."

Laughlin-Hall and Nakada were also named to the All Guard Team and will represent Alaska, the National Guard and the United States in international competitions. They have the opportunity to go onto the World Cup level and potentially the Olympic teams.

"The National Guard doesn't have many opportunities to participate in sport that will support Soldiers and Airmen all the way from novice to the Olympic level," Ruggerio said. "I encourage all Soldiers and Airmen to try out for your state team; you will be surprised at how fast and easy it is to learn this sport."

The 2014 NGB Biathlon Championships boasted athletes from all levels including four former Olympians who are active members of the National Guard.

"My favorite part of competing at the championships was having the pleasure and opportunity to train and race alongside past and future Olympians," expressed Laughlin-Hall. "I believe Alaska has the talent and potential to become the leader in producing biathletes competing and representing the National Guard at the national level. I feel honored to represent my home state of Alaska on a national level."

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ALASKA RESULTS:

Relay

Third: Lt. Col. Matthew Schell, Capt. David Cunningham, Staff Sgt. Jaime Haines, Pfc. Tadhg Nakada

Patrol

Men

Fourth: Lt. Col. Matthew Schell, Capt. David Cunningham, Staff Sgt. Jaime Haines, Pfc. Tadhg Nakada

Pursuit

Female

Fourth: 2nd Lt. Kristine Laughlin-Hall

Male

Third: Pfc. Tadhg Nakada (junior men)

Second: Lt. Col. Matthew Schell (novice men)

First: Staff Sgt. James Haines (novice men)

Sprint

Female

Third: 2nd Lt. Kristine Laughlin-Hall (senior women)

Male

Second: Pfc. Tadhg Nakada (junior men)

First: Lt. Col. Matthew Schell (novice men)

Named to All Guard team:

Pfc. Tadhg Nakada (top 10 overall men)

2nd Lt. Kristine Laughlin-Hall (top 5 overall women)

Photo Cutlines:

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Soldiers and Airmen participate in an awards banquet and closing ceremonies for the National Guard Bureau Biathlon Championships at Camp Johnson, Colchester, Vt., March 6, 2014. More than 140 athletes from 21 different states competed in both individual and team events at the Ethan Allen Firing Range. U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Sarah Mattison

140303-Z-LK849-508

U.S. Army Pfc. Tadhg Nakada of the Alaska Army National Guard, fires his rifle during the pursuit race at the Ethan Allen Firing Range, Jericho, Vt, March 3, 2014. More than 140 athletes from 21 states are competing in the Chief of the National Guard Bureau Biathlon Championships. U.S. Air National Guard photo by A1C Jeffrey Tatro

140303-Z-KE462-052

U.S. Air Force 2nd Lt. Kristi Ann Laughlin-Hall, a member of the Alaska Air National Guard, competes in the senior women's pursuit race at the Ethan Allen Firing Range, Jericho, Vt., March 3, 2014. More than 140 athletes from 21 different states are participating in the 2014 National Guard Bureau Biathlon Championships. U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Sarah Mattison

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Members of the Alaska National Guard Biathlon Team compete in a patrol race at Ethan Allen Firing Range, Jericho, Vt., March 5, 2014. More than 140 athletes from 21 different states are participating in the 2014 National Guard Bureau Biathlon Championships. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Sarah Mattison